

## AMENDMENTS

### In the Claims:

1. (Cancelled)

2. (Currently Amended) ~~The apparatus of Claim 1~~ An apparatus for securing a foot of a wearer in a footwear item, the footwear item having an opening to receive a foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a closure configured to secure the opening, the apparatus comprising:

a footwear item having an opening to receive the foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a tongue including opposing lateral sides configured to close the opening;

at least two pivot members disposed near the opposing lateral sides of the tongue, each of the pivot members being positioned on the footwear item between the opposing lateral sides of the tongue and the heel section; wherein each of the pivot members includes a first pivot slot formed in a surface of the footwear item;

and

a securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough; and

a removable force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve around the pivot members and engage the tongue such that tension applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension in the force member causing a securing force to be applied against the tongue.

3. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein the force member extends from the end sections ~~penetrates~~ penetrates through a surface of the footwear at the first pivot slot-and curves around toward a center line of the tongue at the first pivot slot.

4. (Currently Amended) The apparatus of Claim 2, wherein each of the pivot members further includes a second slot in the surface of the footwear item, such that the force member extends from the end sections, ~~penetrates~~ penetrates through the surface of the footwear item, and curving toward the tongue at a first pivot slot, and the force member extends continues extending toward the tongue ~~penetrating~~ penetrating through the surface of the footwear item at a second slot.

5 - 10. (Canceled)

11. (Currently Amended) ~~The apparatus of Claim 10;~~ An apparatus for securing a foot of a wearer in a footwear item, the footwear item having an opening to receive a foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a closure configured to secure the opening, the apparatus comprising:

a footwear item having an opening to receive the foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a tongue including opposing lateral sides configured to close the opening;

at least two pivot members disposed near the opposing lateral sides of the tongue, each of the pivot members being positioned on the footwear item between the opposing lateral sides of the tongue and the heel section; wherein each of the pivot members includes a first pivot slot formed in a surface of the footwear item;

and

a securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough; and  
a removable force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve around the pivot members and engage the tongue such that tension applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension in the force member causing a securing force to be applied against the tongue;  
a retaining mechanism configured to maintain the force member at a predetermined position relative to the tongue; wherein the retaining mechanism removably secures the force member at the predetermined position;

wherein the retaining mechanism includes:

a positioner disposed on the force member; and  
a plurality of limiters disposed on opposing sides of the predetermined position and configured to engage the positioner to secure the force member at the predetermined position.

12. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 11, wherein the positioner includes a widened element disposed on the force member and each of the limiters includes a guide having an inner width narrower than an outer width of the widened element such that, once the widened element is installed between the guides, the widened element can be removed from between the guides only with application of a removal force sufficient to deform at least one of the widened element of at least one of the guides.

13. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 12, wherein the widened element is installable between the guides by deforming at least one of the widened element and one of the guides.

14. - 28 (Canceled)

29. (Currently Amended) ~~The apparatus of Claim 28~~ An apparatus for securing a foot of a wearer, the apparatus comprising:

a footwear item having an opening to receive a foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a tongue including opposing lateral sides configured to secure the opening;

pivot members proximate to opposing lateral sides of the tongue, each of the pivot members being positioned on footwear item between the opposing sides of the tongue and the heel section; and

a removable securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough;

a force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve around the pivot members and engage the tongue such that tension applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension in the force member causing a securing force to be applied against the tongue;  
and

a retaining device configured to removably secure the force member to the footwear item; wherein the retaining device is configured to maintain the force member at a predetermined position relative to the tongue; and

wherein each of the pivot members is further secured to a securing harness, the securing harness including a heel strap extending between the pivot members beneath the heel and an Achilles strap extending between the pivot members around an Achilles region.

30. (Currently Amended) ~~The apparatus of Claim 27~~ An apparatus for securing a foot of a wearer the apparatus comprising:

a footwear item having an opening to receive a foot disposed generally opposite to a heel section of the footwear item and a tongue including opposing lateral sides configured to secure the opening;

pivot members proximate to opposing lateral sides of the tongue, each of the pivot members being positioned on footwear item between the opposing sides of the tongue and the heel section; and

a removable securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough;

a force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve around the pivot members and engage the tongue such that tension applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension in the force member causing a securing force to be applied against the tongue;  
and

a retaining device configured to removably secure the force member to the footwear item; wherein the retaining device includes:

a positioner disposed on the force member; and

a plurality of limiters disposed on opposing sides of the footwear item and configured to engage the positioner to secure the force member to the footwear item.

31. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 30, wherein the positioner includes a widened element disposed on the force member and each of the limiters includes a guide having an inner width narrower than an outer width of the widened element such that, once the widened element is

installed between the guides, the widened element can be removed from between the guides only with application of a removal force sufficient to deform at least one of the widened element of at least one of the guides.

32. (Original) The apparatus of Claim 31, wherein the widened element is installable between the guides by deforming at least one of the widened element and one of the guides.

33 – 46. (Canceled)

47. (Currently Amended) ~~The system of Claim 46;~~ A footwear system comprising:

a boot, the boot including:

a sole;

an upper joined to the sole and having an inner surface for encasing a foot of a  
wearer and an outer surface;

an opening in a face of the upper generally opposed to a heel section of the  
boot configured to receive a heel of the foot of the wearer the opening  
having two opposing sides; and

a closure configured to secure the opening; and

at least two pivot members disposed on the opposing sides of the opening,  
respectively, each of the pivot members being positioned on a surface of the boot  
between the opposing sides of the opening e and the heel section; and

a removable securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-  
receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough; and

a force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve  
around the pivot members and engage the closure such that tension  
applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension

in the force member causing a securing force being applied against the closure;

wherein each of the pivot members includes at least one first pivot slot formed in a surface of the footwear item.

48. (Previously Amended) The system of Claim 47, wherein the force member extends from the end sections, penetrates a surface of the footwear item at the first pivot slot, and curves around the first pivot slot toward a centerline of the closure.

49. (Previously Amended) The system of Claim 47, wherein each of the pivot members includes a second slot in the surface of the footwear item, such that the force member extends from the end sections, penetrates the surface of the footwear item the first pivot slot, and curves toward a centerline of the closure at the first pivot slot, and the force member again penetrates the surface of the footwear item at the second slot and continues extending toward the closure at the second slot.

50. – 55. (Canceled)

56. (Currently Amended) ~~The system of Claim 55,~~ A footwear system comprising:  
a boot, the boot including:

a sole;

an upper joined to the sole and having an inner surface for encasing a foot of a wearer and an outer surface;

an opening in a face of the upper generally opposed to a heel section of the boot configured to receive a heel of the foot of the wearer the opening having two opposing sides; and

a closure configured to secure the opening; and

at least two pivot members disposed on the opposing sides of the opening,  
respectively, each of the pivot members being positioned on a surface of the boot  
between the opposing sides of the opening e and the heel section; and

a removable securing device including:

a plurality of end sections, each of the end sections including a fastener-  
receiving opening configured for a fastener to pass therethrough; and

a force member extending from the end sections and configured to curve  
around the pivot members and engage the closure such that tension  
applied to the fastener applies force to the end sections resulting in tension  
in the force member causing a securing force being applied against the  
closure;

further comprising a retaining mechanism configured to maintain the force  
member at a predetermined position relative to a centerline of the closure;  
wherein the retaining mechanism removably secures the force member at  
the predetermined position;

wherein the retaining mechanism includes:

a positioner disposed on the force member; and

a plurality of limiters disposed on opposing sides of the predetermined position and  
configured to engage the positioner to secure the force member at the predetermined position.

57. (Original) The system of Claim 56, wherein the positioner includes a widened element  
disposed on the force member and each of the limiters includes a guide having an inner width  
narrower than an outer width of the widened element such that, once the widened element is  
installed between the guides, the widened element can be removed from between the guides only



with application of a removal force sufficient to deform at least one of the widened element of at least one of the guides.

58. (Original) The system of Claim 57, wherein the widened element is installable between the guides by deforming at least one of the widened element and one of the guides.

59. – 80. (Canceled)

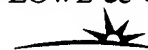
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